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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: GOC AND ELN WORK ON CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT; SENIOR
ELN FIGURE SAYS CHOICE IS PEACE OR NARCOTRAFFICKING

REF: A. BOGOTA 416

[1](#)B. 06 BOGOTA 11305

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) GOC and ELN representatives meet in Venezuela on January 24 to discuss a ceasefire agreement. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told us in December the GOC would insist the ELN implement a ceasefire in February and would link political space for the ELN to release of its kidnap victims. Civil society guarantor Moritz Akerman told us of a recent letter ELN negotiator Francisco Galan wrote to the ELN Central Command, saying the ELN's choice is peace or narcotrafficking, and Father Dario Echeverri said the international community could not ignore the ELN's drug trafficking for much longer. Spanish Charge Pablo Gomez de Olea told us lack of public interest in the process reflected skepticism about the ELN's ability to take difficult decisions. End summary.

Ceasefire Talks in Caracas

[1](#)2. (C) GOC and ELN representatives meet January 24 in Caracas to discuss a mutual ceasefire. Akerman claimed the ELN understands it has only two things to offer the GOC: a ceasefire, and release of kidnap victims. In return for a ceasefire, the ELN wants GOC approval to expand the number of ELN members permitted to travel within Colombia, and an increase in the number of "Houses of Peace" in the country. The ELN's purpose is to expand its "political outreach."

[1](#)3. (C) Akerman reported Restrepo planned to tell the ELN it should agree to a ceasefire or the GOC would freeze the talks. In mid-December, Restrepo told us the GOC wants agreement on implementation of a ceasefire in February and would link increased political space for the ELN to a suspension of hostilities and release of its kidnap victims. Guarantor Alvaro Jimenez noted the ELN's Central Command had sent two COCE members to Caracas, adding Pablo Beltran to the delegation headed by military commander Antonio Garcia, which Jimenez said suggested a seriousness of purpose the ELN had

not shown in the past.

14. (C) Akerman said the GOC would not insist on immediate disarmament or concentration of ELN forces as part of a ceasefire. Still, the GOC would insist on "placing the ELN's arms beyond use." The GOC also favored a "national" ceasefire verification commission composed of GOC and ELN representatives. The ELN was pushing for UN involvement in verification and rejected OAS participation because it wanted to avoid being associated with the paramilitary demobilization process. Jimenez told us Bogota Mayor Lucho Garzon had agreed to serve as a facilitator of the talks should a ceasefire be implemented and had the consent of both parties for this role.

15. (C) While Akerman and Jimenez said the parties could use the financing mechanism already in place to fund the talks and adapt it for the ceasefire phase, Norwegian Charge Dag Nylander was less sanguine. Currently, international community contributions to the negotiation phase are channeled through the UNDP's Bogota office. Nylander told us the ceasefire phase could involve substantial sums for the ELN and raise challenging political issues that would require broad discussion. Also sounding a cautious note, Spanish Charge Gomez de Olea said the public's lack of interest in the process reflected skepticism about the ELN's ability to take tough decisions.

Pilot Demining Project

16. (C) The guarantors shared a copy of an ELN proposal to work with the GOC and international experts to demine in the greater Samaniego area, Narino department. The proposal, currently under GOC review, would involve a "bilateral, local, and temporary" ceasefire to allow demining teams to deploy. Akerman said the ELN was making an effort to reach out to the GOC on the proposal, and had learned a lesson from its previous "unilateral" offer to demine in Samaniego.

Havana Fading as Future Venue

17. (C) Akerman noted the GOC and ELN appeared to agree Havana was an increasingly unsuitable venue for the talks. He said uncertainty associated with Castro's illness and Cuban Communist Party hostility to a separate GOC-ELN deal that "excluded" the FARC were pushing the parties towards Caracas as a future venue. The ELN was happier with this development than the GOC, but the latter no longer opposed a move. Akerman predicted there would be one more round in Cuba, possibly in February, and subsequent talks would be in Venezuela.

ELN Drug Trafficking

18. (C) The guarantors told us that Galan (whom the GOC said on January 23 had served three-fifths of his 30-year sentence and was now a free man) wrote to the COCE in late November to say the ELN's choice was "peace or narcotrafficking." Akerman said the letter noted the ELN was "losing its people" to corruption and drug trafficking, and the ELN could no longer avoid the choice. In a related vein, National Conciliation Commission member Father Dario Echeverri told us on January 17 that ELN fronts were increasingly involved in narcotics trafficking, making it harder for the international community to ignore. ELN combat with the FARC was not over ideology, he said, but rather about drug routes and proceeds.

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